



# International Journal of Advanced Research in Arts, Science, Engineering & Management

Volume 10, Issue 2, March 2023



INTERNATIONAL  
STANDARD  
SERIAL  
NUMBER  
INDIA





# Working Environment for Women at Workplace

Aanchal Suresh Jain

Assistant Professor, Ladhi Devi Ramdhar Maheshwari Night College of Commerce, Mumbai,  
Maharashtra, India

**ABSTRACT:** Organizations that don't realize the importance of women in the workplace are missing out. Besides doubling your talent pool, more women may also improve your company's performance. Previous research has shown that women in the workplace and gender diversity is key for organizations' bottom lines: Fortune 500 companies with the highest representation of women on boards financially outperform companies with the lowest representation of women on boards. Gender-diverse teams have higher sales and profits compared to male-dominated teams. A recent Gallup study found that gender-diverse business units have higher average revenue than less diverse business units. But the benefits of having more women in the workplace are not limited to just financial gains. In a large survey study, we asked hundreds of respondents to estimate what percentage of individuals in their workplace were women. Answers ranged from 0–100%, with the average being about 45% (pretty close to the U.S. national workplace average). We then asked them a number of questions about their workplace environments. Results showed that having a higher percentage of women in the workplace predicted:

- More job satisfaction;
- More organizational dedication;
- More meaningful work; and
- Less burnout.

**KEYWORDS:** women, workplace, satisfaction, dedication, less burnout, financial, environments

## I. INTRODUCTION

More women in the workplace is also positively related to employee engagement and retention. Specifically, when asked why they stay with their current employer, people from organizations with a high percentage of women were more likely to cite positive and meaningful organizational culture, including having<sup>1</sup>:

- Enjoyable work;
- A job that fits well with other areas of their life; and
- Opportunities to make a difference.

These new findings persist, regardless of participants' age, industry, organization size, leadership level, ethnicity, and gender.<sup>2</sup>

In fact, our findings were even stronger for men on some measures. Specifically, men reported being more satisfied with their job, enjoying their work more, and not feeling as burned out if they worked for companies that employed higher percentages of women. The most common reason women gave for staying with their current employer was that their job fits well with other areas of their life,<sup>3</sup> followed by enjoying the work that they do, and believing that their job gives them the opportunity to make a difference. Moreover, many women talked about having personally meaningful work that connects to their values, purpose, and work-life balance. Together, these reasons describe a specific type of employment that social scientists refer to as "a calling." Callings are jobs that people feel drawn to pursue; find intrinsically enjoyable and meaningful; and see as a central part of their identity. Research shows that experiencing work as a "calling" is related to increased job satisfaction.<sup>4</sup> When women were asked to rate the importance of workplace perks and benefits, flexibility concerns rose to the top of the list. Paid time off was rated as the most



important perk, followed by healthcare benefits, paid leadership development, flexible schedules, and opportunities to move up in the organization.<sup>5</sup>

Compared to a control group of men, women also rated paid time off and working from home as higher priorities. Flexibility might be particularly critical when it comes to retaining talented women who also want to raise families — women with children rated having a flexible schedule and being able to work from home as more important compared to women who didn't have children. In our sample, women were just as likely as men to be interested in raises, promotions, and leadership development opportunities.<sup>6</sup> They were also just as likely to ask for and accept leadership opportunities. But women in the workplace expressed different reasons for turning down leadership opportunities compared to men. Men typically turned down positions because they didn't want them (e.g., not interested in the role, didn't like the supervisor, didn't want to relocate, didn't want to work longer hours, or didn't get offered enough money). While some women shared these concerns, women also uniquely mentioned that they were not confident in their qualifications, not sure that others would support them, and were worried that they were being set up for failure<sup>7</sup>. Unfortunately, research suggests that these concerns among women are valid. Studies show that organizations expect women to be more qualified than men for the same positions, and that leadership opportunities for men often come with more resources (funding, supervisor support, team size) compared to women's leadership opportunities. What's more, women are more likely to get "glass cliff" positions — leadership opportunities that are high stakes, precarious, and have a high likelihood of failure. Given this, it's not surprising that many women said that the single most important thing organizations can do to attract and retain talented women is to admonish sexism and offer gender parity in pay, experiences, and opportunities for success.<sup>8</sup>

Here are a few things organizational leaders can do to help women (and people of all genders) get what they want out of work:

- Help employees find meaningfulness and enjoyment in their work. Take the time to learn about their personal values, passions, strengths, and life goals. Brainstorm ways to integrate these things into their career. Small changes in how work is framed and executed can go a long way toward turning a job into a calling.<sup>9</sup>
- When possible and practical, support people in working remotely, and allow them to work hours that make sense for their lives outside of work. Creative solutions such as job sharing (having multiple people share one role), virtual work teams, and sabbatical options can help employers find the best talent no matter where or when they need to work.
- Give all genders equal opportunities to get promotions, raises, and develop their leadership skills — coupled with the resources and support system they need to achieve success. Effective leader development experiences need to be challenging, yet obtainable, with clear rewards for efforts and successes. Provide mentoring and sponsoring to support talented women with a network of champions.<sup>10</sup>

## II. DISCUSSION

To Create a Better Work Environment for Women

Creating a workplace that promotes gender equality is a priority for many employers these days. And luckily, the ways of going about that goal aren't rocket science.

Whether you're a large company or small, there are several aspects of workplace culture that you should focus on in trying to create a more gender inclusive workplace.<sup>11</sup>

Here are a few of them.

1. Educate your team about sexism in the workplace.

This is a no-brainer, but it's still a problem in far too many workplaces: men and women need to be treated equally. While many companies have policies that protect people from discrimination and sexual harassment, that's only part of the battle. Consider bringing in experts to educate your team about the roles that unconscious bias and sexism play in the workplace. Take complaints seriously and don't take shortcuts in trying to get to the bottom of them. It's all about action.<sup>12</sup>



2. Be flexible.

In this day and age, technology has afforded us more ways of connecting to one another than we've ever had. Put that opportunity to use and consider offering more flexibility in terms of workplace schedules. It's not always a matter of shifting someone's schedule from 9 to 5 to 12 to 8 — sometimes, it's just being clear with employees that they can adjust their schedules for whatever curveball comes their way — after-school meetings, doctor appointments, etc. Make your team know it's more about performance than about how many hours you're clocking in and out.<sup>13</sup>

3. Be generous with maternity leave (and paternity leave)

Companies that are focused on promoting gender equality should take a hard look at their parental leave policies. Clearly, a generous and flexible maternity leave policy is helpful to women, but offering a generous and flexible paternity leave policy is often just as important. After all, raising a kid should be the responsibility of both parents, and by extending solid parental leave packages for people of all genders, you're making the situation better for everyone involved.<sup>14</sup>

4. Do a pay equity analysis.

The #MeToo and #TimesUp movements have put a lot of pressure on companies to narrow the pay gaps that exist between men and women. One of the best ways to tackle this is to run a pay equity analysis to see if there are gaps in your own pay scales and where those gaps exist. Many companies rely on the help of outside firms to get this done, though it can also be done in-house, if resources allow. The goal is to create more transparency and equality at all levels of the organization.

5. Be a champion of work-life balance.

Work-life balance has become one of the most important pieces of a job. In a survey by Comparably, 35% of people said work-life balance was actually \*the\* most important thing about a job besides salary, making it the most popular answer overall. As an employer, be a champion of work-life balance. Set the example at the top — have your top leadership speak about how they balance work and family life. Be generous with vacation and paid-time-off. Your ultimate goal should be for employees to feel that they can, and should, prioritize their out-of-work life.

6. Consider child care programs and other forms of assistance<sup>15</sup>

If your company has the resources for it, it may be wise to consider having childcare on site or offering a subsidy for childcare through the benefits package.

Women's safety and its issues are discussed and debated all around the globe. Still, every year the number of reports on sexual harassment is increasing at an alarming rate. In the past decade, women have progressively earned a higher standard in the workplace. Women are now gaining higher positions and form a big/massive section of any working sector around the globe.

Women now are more independent in every sense. They are competent enough to take care of themselves and their families. They are more able to make their own life choices and live on their terms. However, everyday women are mistreated in the workplace by their co-workers. After the #metoo and #timesup in the U.S, more women are coming forward to tell their horror stories. Susan Fowler, an ex-employee from Uber, claimed how her team manager harassed her on the very first day at work<sup>16</sup>. The incident led her to leave her team and eventually Uber. Following the incident, many other harassment complaints were filed. In mid-2017, Uber fired 20 employees after investigating the sexual harassment claims and workplace culture. The statistics on sexual harassment in the workplace are very shocking. And it varies from place to place. According to the survey, 81 percent of women have faced sexual harassment in their lives. Sexual harassment can lead to anxiety, depression, lower self-esteem, alienation, and overall physical and mental health degradation. It's disturbing that women at work still face sexual harassment, which is why many of them even quit their jobs. Sexual harassment is the unwanted or inappropriate promise of rewards in exchange for sexual favors. It is unwelcome sexual behavior, which makes a person feel offended, humiliated, degraded, or intimidated. It is non-consensual and unacceptable.<sup>17</sup>



## Forms of Sexual Harassment

**Quid Pro Quo:** Quid Pro Quo is a Latin phrase that means a favor for a favor or this for that. However, the expression varies in different contexts. But in the context of sexual harassment, the term means seeking sexual favors in exchange for any work benefits, promotions, salary increments, or fulfillment of any asked favors<sup>18</sup>.

**Hostile Work Environment:** A hostile work environment is a general form of sexual harassment. It is an influence or behavior targeted towards women, making it hard for them to work in a workplace. According to several surveys, the most prominent hostile work environment actions are:

- Derogatory remarks on females workers.
- Gender discrimination.
- Unpleasant compliments, body shaming, stroking, or grabbing without consent.
- Sharing pornographic materials through notes or emails.
- Spreading rumors about personal life.
- Rape or attempted rape.<sup>19</sup>

## Facts about sexual harassment according to U.S Equal Employment Opportunity Commission

Here are some crucial points on sexual harassment. However, remember that harassment can take place in a variety of circumstances and are not limited to the following:

- The victim and the harasser can be a member of the same or opposite gender.
- The harasser can be the victim's supervisor, the employer's agent, a supervisor in another area, a co-worker, or a non-employee.
- The victim does not have to be the person harassed. It could be anyone affected by the offensive conduct.
- Unlawful sexual harassment may not bring economic injury to the victim or discharge of the victim.
- The harasser's conduct must be offensive or unwelcome.<sup>20</sup>

## III. RESULTS

### 1. Sexual Harassment Policy:

Any big/small organizations must have a Sexual Harassment Policy which defines:

- Sexual harassment and its forms
- Explain the zero-tolerance approach
- Educate on inappropriate conduct
- Outline consequences<sup>21</sup>

### 2. Create Awareness Among the Employees:

It's sad that many organizations and people, in general, are still not aware of women's safety in the workplace. It's very clear from the statistics and cases on sexual harassment in the workplace. Creating awareness among the employees on women's safety and their health is vital. You can use all possible techniques and ideas to spread awareness. Workshops, open group discussions, or activities can help create awareness of women's safety in the workplace.<sup>22</sup>



Wellness programs are a must when it comes to the physical and psychological health of your workers. Awareness starts with the implementation of guidelines and laws against sexual harassment in the workplace. Therefore without understanding the root cause, you cannot stop any discrimination against women.<sup>23</sup>

### 3. Encourage Women to Express:

Generally, women facing sexual harassment don't speak up. We as a society are responsible for this. We teach our girl child to behave and act in a particular way. Since childhood, we give them a set of do's and don't. This conditioning later stops women from expressing themselves. They feel shame and fear consequences. Other reasons are low self-esteem and lack of information. You must encourage the female employees to express and come out of their discomfort. Try boosting their confidence by implementing equal opportunities for both male and female workers in the workplace. The sense of equality in the workplace will make them fight the social stigma.<sup>24</sup>

### 4. Role of an HR:

HR needs to explain to the employees about the safe work environment. And must play the role of an intermediate to highlight any complaint or any women issues to higher authorities. In the Workplace Orientation Programme, HR needs to give strict guidelines on sexual harassment to the new employees. It is HR's role to bring notice of any unwelcome behavior faced by the employees to higher authorities. Since the management needs to take unbiased actions, the participation of HR is most important here.<sup>25</sup>

Infosys is doing it right in this aspect.

Richard Lobo, Executive Vice President and Head of Human Resources at Infosys Ltd, said that whenever people join their organization, especially at the entry-level, they undergo training sessions where they receive case studies of what is okay and what is not okay in the workplace. They also explain the mechanisms to bring misconduct to the attention of someone who can do something about it. Therefore, they make sure counseling and support are available.

### 5. Internal Complaints Committee (ICC) on Women's Safety:

The Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace (Prevention, Prohibition and Redressal) Act, 2013 ("POSH Act") has made ICC compulsory for both the private and non-private for women's safety on sexual harassment.<sup>26</sup>

A woman who is harassed can make the complaint within 90 days of the incident. If the woman is not comfortable expressing herself near ICC, in that case, her co-worker, friend, or relative can complain. But, to do so, they need to have written consent from her. ICC then takes the responsibility to investigate the issue properly. The inquiry should take place within 90 days. And once completed, a report has to be issued within ten days. Any workplace with ten or more employees needs to form ICC to address sexual harassment in the workplace. ICC should have a team of at least four members. At least 50% of the members should be women. The chairperson of ICC has to be a woman. And half of the members of the committee must have some experience in social work/legal knowledge. There must also be a third-party member who is a social worker from an NGO committed to the cause of women. Organizations need to develop tactics and ideas that suit them best to ensure women's safety in the workplace. And they must have a sexual harassment policy. And it could vary with the demographic and types of harassment one faces in the organizations. Sexual harassment and degradation of women in the workplace is not a recent story. It has been prevailing in the world for decades. As a part of society, we must make a healthy and safe environment for our women in the workplace.<sup>27</sup>

## IV. CONCLUSIONS

Women have been trying to break away from norms and standards set by society. They have been marching for equal rights and fighting for their rightful place in the world. True, the #MeToo movement has begun to smash down centuries of patriarchy, but we still have a long way to go, especially in corporations, where the adage glass ceiling is



still quite prevalent. For the last four years, Leanin.org and McKinsey have been researching the participation and inclusivity of women in the workplace. While it might seem like the world is progressing and there's a rising involvement of women in the workplace, the reality is quite different. As the report suggests, "progress isn't slow. It's stalled." Women continue to remain underrepresented at every level, starting from entry-level jobs to C-suite roles. According to the Women In the Workplace 2018 report, representation of women of color is the least causing them to stay behind white men, men of color, and white women. Women of color comprise only 17% of entry-level roles and 4% of C-Suite positions. This underrepresentation gets worse in senior management positions. Only 22% of C-suite executives are women. Compared to 62% of men in managerial positions, only 38% of women are promoted to be managers. What's interesting to see is that the number of women and men leaving their companies is almost the same. Therefore, attrition can't be blamed for this inequality and misogyny.<sup>28</sup>

Women earn 77.9 cents for every dollar earned by men. Research by Payscale says that in 2018, the median salary for women is roughly 22 percent lower than the median salary for men. In India, too, the fight for equal wages continues. The Labour Bureau in India has found that in rural areas in the agricultural sector, the daily wage for men is ₹264.05 and ₹205.32 for women. In non-agricultural sectors, the average daily wage rate for men is ₹271.17, while for women it is ₹205.90.<sup>24</sup>

The #MeToo movement brought out numerous cases of women facing sexual and non-sexual harassment in the workplace. These cases ranged from unwelcome verbal, visual, non-verbal or physical harassment. The Women in the Workplace report found that 35% of women in full-time corporate sector jobs have experienced sexual harassment. Another study by EEOC estimates that 75% of women subject to such hostile situations will not report their harassment. And especially when the abuser is someone in senior positions. People often ask, "why did the victim not report?" The primary reason for this is the fear of being fired. The same research by EEOC found that "75% of harassment victims experienced retaliation when they reported it."<sup>25</sup>

During child-rearing years, the unemployment penalty for women is longer. This means that when women take longer leaves, they have a much harder time getting rehired. The report by Payscale that I have mentioned earlier also says that "someone unemployed for less than three months faces only a 3.4 percent penalty while someone who has not worked in over a year experiences a 7.3 percent penalty." The report shows that the percentage of men unemployed for 12+ months between the age of 20-29 is 4% while for women it's 11%. Between the age group 30-44, the number of unemployed men and women is 10% and 20% respectively. This ultimately reflects in the gender pay gap making it harder for women to hold senior-level positions.<sup>26</sup>

64% of Americans say that racism continues to be a major problem in society. In the workplaces, too, it continues to be a problem. White men and women continue to get hired over people of color, women from diverse ethnicities. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission's (EEOC) 2017 workplace discrimination claims found that race discrimination claims accounted for 33.9 percent. A report published by the UK govt in 2017 shows that if black and minority ethnic (BME) talent was fully utilised in the UK, their economy could be boosted by upto \$29 billion. A typical example of racial and ethnic discrimination faced by women in the workplace is telling them that they won't fit in with the culture and work ethics and hiring a white person over them.<sup>28</sup>

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